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The Doina Dobrean Collection

Magdalena Andreescu

Highly populated by Romanians, Subcetate commune lies in the north-western part of Harghita County, in an area inhabited mainly by ethnic Hungarians. A textile collection consisting of Romanian costumes from the first half of the last century took shape in Doina Dobrean's house. A former teacher, Doina Dobrean began to collect a few years ago sewing samples for a school project she was fond of more than she could have imagined. 'How could I destroy a shirt? [...] Nobody cares for these things, you know, people just throw them away or burn them. Others told me: we sent them to the landfill, we burnt them. I was deeply grieved because of that! I was suddenly seized with a thrill. How beautiful these things are! I asked somebody else: do you have any shirts [...] Since I could not find any, I persevered in looking for them.'

The need to preserve the objects handcrafted by her mother and grandmother was another decisive factor that urged her to make a collection. When I saw my mother deeply grieved, I told her: never mind, mother, we'll arrange them in a room of the house to your liking. I prefer putting them here to buying new furniture. It will be alright! Then I'll leave them in my will and thus they will reach a famous museum.'

The way in which local Hungarians preserve their national specificity is another significant as-

pect that is relevant to the decision of putting her best into a time-consuming, scrupulous and financially demanding endeavour. 'I found out that all young people i.e., the Hungarians in Gheorgheni) who leave high-school order a national costume to be preserved at home [...] They don't know on what occasion – an event or a festival – they are going to use it. If only we were [i.e. nationalists], at least to some extent... I showed my pupils how they preserve their... And how they gradually hand them down...-that's another factor which influenced my decision... For I know it very well, I lived in this area where they used to wear red and black-striped hems...'

The collector's perseverance led to an increase in the number of purchased or donated objects that added to the pieces she made on her own or to those inherited from her mother and grandmother once with the love for sown and manually woven pieces. Apart from shirts, the collection includes other costume accessories, indoor textile (sheets, table clothes, pillow slips, towels – ritual towels included, curtains, carpets). Wooden tools stand proof of the thread processing craft: shuttles, distaffs, weaver's reeds. The collector gathered a few plates and old pots in order to embellish the indoor background. Doina Dobrean made the collection of

shirts according to crystal-clear criteria. 'I wanted local sown shirts because this was of great interest for my book on sewing. It didn't matter whether they were beautiful or not. I also found shirts with similar ornaments embroidered on nylon. I didn't use the sewing machine.' She chose pieces characteristic of her native commune and of the Romanian communes in the area of Toplița (Sârmaș, Capu-Corbului). 'She had many (shirts), but she is not from our village and the other ones were not specific to this area. [...] Those beautiful shirts were somehow typical of Transylvania, of Mureș, of the plain area... Then I said: they are not representative of this area!'

Doina Dobrean does not aim to set up a private museum focusing on her collection, but she believes that this could represent the core of a future village museum built under the patronage of the City Hall: 'I wouldn't be able to take care of it because of my advanced years. [...] I would be willing to work there a few hours a day!' Some members of the community promised to support her. 'Now some of them are reticent, turn a deaf ear to it, but others with whom I collaborated are excited and that's why they helped me. I asked them to gather the shirts, hoping that one day we will set up a local museum. It would be great, madam, because I have a lot of shirts and I would give some to the village museum!' Moreover, she tried hard to convince the local authorities to help her obtain an appropriate space (an old house that once belonged to her family). 'It would be great if we could have this house! Maybe we could do something if we got a hundred dollars. But there are no money and no team whatsoever. You can't do it on your own. [...] I'm not referring to my fellows from Subcetate, not to Hungarians...'

Living alone, the collector preferred to keep silent about the wonders she has collected: 'Not only those who gave me the objects know about this. I keep a record of all objects. I have no bad intention. I won't sell them! [...] I will allow my fellows to donate them to a famous museum.

They must not sell these objects because otherwise I will call down curses on them!' However, after a few villagers had seen the car that was carrying them to the Romanian Peasant Museum, they spread a rumour that the priest sold the shirts. Nobody said anything about the car that brought the objects back, which made Doina Dobrean take action in this respect: 'One Sunday I talked about my collection at the church – there were many people there – and I invited them to pay me a visit.'

With passion and dexterity Doina Dobrean prepares every object to become part of the collection. 'I washed all of them. I didn't boil this shirt because its black colour is of a very poor quality [...] I don't know what happened before 1940 when shirts were made of shining, high quality cotton which did not lose its colour. Even if the lye turns black when the cotton is boiled on the stove, it preserves its colour. The linen gets discoloured and the cotton turns white.' Doina Dobrean did not hesitate to restore the objects in a gentle or more radical manner. 'I received two dirty sleeves full of gas oil that were stored in an attic. I said to myself that I had to run the risk of boiling them since there was no way out. Some dim stains are still visible. I sewed the gussets and the collar and I turned it into a new shirt'. The collection is carefully preserved (low temperature, airing and cleaning whenever necessary, protection against pests) 'I am very careful. This is a period when there are lots of butterflies and I am cautious. I never open the window unless covered by a net. I never keep the door open.'

Most textile objects were initially sheltered in an old kitchen cupboard. Following the experience gained at the exhibition mounted at the Romanian Peasant Museum, the collector purchased a piece of modular furniture where the shirts are neatly arranged on coat hangers. The parade bed made room for some cupboards in which other pieces are beautifully arranged on the plates, protected against dust and natural light. 'It's easier. I pack them, put them in a

cupboard and store them. I don't necessarily exhibit them! I simply store them!

Scrupulous and diligent, Doina Dobrean drew up an effective record-keeping system, wrote in a register the most important data on the collection objects and sewed an inventory number on every shirt. 'I put down all these details lest I should forget them. I keep a record of them. I wrote down the name of the person who gave them to me, the date when I received them and the time when they were made. Later on I thought of asking them to sign in the register. [...] I also wrote on the shirts on which I also sewed the number. I suffer from heart disease, so if I die one day, people will know the whole thing...'

The collector's approach to the building of the museum also included important research on the evolution of the local folk costume in the 20th century. 'I am well-documented! My mother says that some shirts belonged to her or to my grandmother and then I assessed the whole situation, being able to compare them according to the type of material, cotton and beads. Neither cotton nor the decorative motifs have been the same after 1940. They have been modernised due to television and to a greater influence from other areas. After having collected plenty of objects... I said to myself while sewing: how about

writing a book?' The research also included bibliographical studies and visual documentation undertaken in the archive of scanned old family photos borrowed from villagers and of photos taken personally during her trips around the area. It's so nice to display visuals in a museum... [...] Yes, I walked around the village with a camera and took photos of things I liked: house architectural styles, priests officiating funeral ceremonies, the 2005-2007 festival...'

The book entitled *Artistic Sewing in Subcetate Mureş (Harghita)*, launched in 2008 at the opening of the collective exhibition 'The Collection of all Collections' mounted at the Romanian Peasant Museum, is the outcome of over two years of hard work. Both the so much craved-for book she printed on her own and her participation in the above-mentioned exhibition are one more proof that Doina Dobrean is not just a collector, but also a person eager to bring to light and share with everyone the treasure about which she states: 'it is very dear to me because its own language speaks volumes of the industry, the skill and the talent of some women [...] who belong to a different time and to a fascinating world I am trying to rediscover and know, for I feel myself tied with these wonderful anonymous toilers of land.'







DOINA DOBREAN
Subiecte 252
5/ PROSCAPE (1-1)

SITUAȚIE

Nr. crt	Obiectul	DESCRIERE	Numele - prenumele și adresa donatorului	Data	Proveniența	Data - re	Semnătura	Obs.
1	5.1	- bont din ea în ea, cu 4 ale multicolor - brodie cu clovi - fite pe fir - conțea - franjuri încheiate la capete, din ea	DOBREAN IOANA - MD		bont personal	1942		- bont în obiecte
2	5.2	- bont din ea în ea în 4 ale - brodie multicolor în 2 fite - lăbile la capete - franjuri încheiate la capete, din ea	DOBREAN IOANA (Pop)		bont, conț franji capete personal bont	1942		
3	5.3	- bont din ea în ea în 4 ale - brodie multicolor, ea a fite pe fir - oie - franjuri încheiate la capete, din ea în ea	DOBREAN IOANA (Pop)		personal	1942		
4	5.4	- bont din ea în ea în 4 ale - brodie multicolor în 2 fite - lăbile la capete - franjuri încheiate la capete, din ea în ea	DOBREAN IOANA, MD		bont, Pop bont - bont	1942 - 1930		- franjuri bont de bont - bont - Pop din
5	5.5	- bont din ea în ea în 4 ale - brodie multicolor în 2 fite - lăbile la capete - franjuri încheiate la capete, din ea în ea	DOBREAN DOINA MD		bont de bont, IOANA DOBREAN	1971		- bont
6	5.6	- bont din ea în ea în 4 ale - brodie multicolor în 2 fite - lăbile la capete - franjuri încheiate la capete, din ea în ea	DOBREAN IOANA, MD		bont POP ANA	1920 - 1930 1938 -	de bont franji	
7	5.7	- bont din ea în ea în 4 ale - brodie multicolor în 2 fite - lăbile la capete - franjuri încheiate la capete, din ea în ea	DOBREAN IOANA, MD		bont personal	1980		- bont bont de bont
8	5.8	- bont din ea în ea în 4 ale - brodie multicolor în 2 fite - lăbile la capete - franjuri încheiate la capete, din ea în ea	DOBREAN IOANA, MD		bont personal (bont + franji)	1980		

